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# LEON TROTSKY ON LABOR PARTY

stenographic report of discussion held in 1938  
with leaders of socialist workers party



With Introduction:

## THE STRUGGLE FOR AN AMERICAN LABOR PARTY

BULLETIN PUBLICATIONS

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## INTRODUCTION

# The Struggle For An American Labor Party

We are reprinting in this pamphlet the 1938 discussions held between Leon Trotsky and leading members of the Socialist Workers Party on the subject of a labor party in the United States. These discussions have been out of print for some years. They are must reading for all those who are looking for a revolutionary perspective to guide present struggles.

It is first necessary to place these discussions in their historical context. This question, the relationship between American Marxists and an independent political party of the working class, had been raised before. It was introduced from outside the U.S. on at least three separate occasions: by Marx and Engels in the 1870s and 1880s, by Lenin and the rest of the leadership of the Third International in the years immediately following the October Revolution, and by Trotsky in 1938, during the preparations for the founding of the Fourth International.

The outside intervention on all three occasions was made necessary by the theoretical and methodological confusion of the American movement. This was proof of the crucial role played by an international leadership of the working class. After the betrayal of the Second International, the new Communist International sought to clarify the issues. The same role was played by Trotsky and the Fourth International after the degeneration of the first workers' state and the Third International. Without an international movement these steps to overcome the confusion of U.S. Marxists would not have been undertaken.

### engels on labor party

Over a period of many years Marx and Engels strove to show their American followers the importance of finding a road to the workers at the same time as they developed theory. An English-speaking section of the American followers of Marx and Engels, a motley collection of middle class reformers and idealists, soon parted ways with the movement. These people did not even claim to be interested in finding a road to the workers. The more orthodox group, however, consisting primarily of German-speaking foreign-born workers in the U.S., also separated itself from the American workers and their struggles.

These people went so far as to refuse to learn English. On many occasions Marx and Engels criticized these followers and tried to get them to change their course. Engels wrote in 1886:

The great thing is to get the working class to move as a class...Therefore I think also the Knights of Labor a most important factor in the movement which ought not to be pooh-poohed from without but to be revolutionized from within, and I consider that many of the Germans there have made a grievous mistake when they tried, in the face of a mighty and glorious movement not of their own creation, to make of their imported and not always understood theory a kind of alleinseligmachendes (it alone bringing salvation) dogma, and to keep aloof from any movement which did not accept that dogma...What the Germans ought to do is to act up to their own theory--if they understand it, as we did in 1845 and 1848--to go in for any real general working class movement, accept its faktische (actual) starting point as such and work it gradually up to the theoretical level by pointing out how every mistake made, every reverse suffered, was a necessary consequence of mistaken theoretical orders in the original program; they ought, in the words of the Communist Manifesto: to represent the future of the movement in the present of the movement.

In another letter written by Engels at this time, he said:

The first great step of importance for every country newly entering into the movement is always the constitution of the workers as an independent political party, no matter how, so long as it is a distinct workers party.

But the German workers did not really change. As Engels said:

The Germans have not understood how to use their theory as a lever which could set the American masses in motion; they do not understand the theory themselves for the most part and treat it in a doctrinaire and dogmatic way as something that has to be learned by



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heart, which then will satisfy all requirements forthwith. To them it is a credo and not a guide to action.

Following the Russian Revolution, the American Communists began with the same sectarian conceptions as their German-speaking forerunners of a generation earlier. Most of these early Communists, indeed the vast majority, were foreign-born, recent immigrants to America. They stood aloof from the labor movement, and had no interest in the concept of a labor party or working toward such a party.

#### **lenin intervenes**

In 1920, at the Second Congress of the Communist International, Lenin had two conversations with Louis Fraina, one of the most gifted young adherents of the Russian Revolution in the U.S. In the first discussion Lenin tried to convince Fraina that American Communists should support a Labor Party. In the second conversation Lenin, having failed to convince Fraina on the Labor Party question, began a discussion on the need for philosophy in the movement. Lenin raised the question of the labor party again the following year, at the Third Congress of the Communist International. By 1922 the American Communists had begun to accept the idea of favoring and fighting for a labor party.

This is the way Theodore Draper reports it in his "Roots of American Communism":

Lenin also berated the American Commun-

ists for boycotting the elections and refusing to support the presidential candidacy of Debs on the Socialist ticket in 1920. He even raised the question whether a Labor party would not facilitate the task of the American Communists. This suggestion had been made by Lenin to Fraina the previous year without evoking any reaction. This time it was reported back by the delegates and taken more seriously.

The patience and persistence of the Bolshevik leadership on this matter is noteworthy. They insisted, in addition, that the American party turn away from its sectarian underground existence. This was linked to the labor party question. Legality and bourgeois democracy had to be taken advantage of wherever possible if the working class was going to be reached and convinced of the correctness of the revolutionary program.

Thus the 1938 discussions did not begin from zero. They were part of a long struggle to build a revolutionary movement in the United States.

At each point, in 1886, in 1920, in 1938 and today as well, an immense contradiction has confronted Marxists in the United States. This is the contradiction between the tremendous and often violent class struggle on the one hand, and the absence of an independent workers' party on the other, between the potential power of the working class and its complete submission to the capitalists politically. This contradiction, stemming from the enormous wealth of U.S. imperialism as well as certain peculiarities of American historical development, poses enormous tasks for American Marxists.

Of course much has changed since 1886. Between 1886 and 1920 millions of workers were organized into craft unions, primarily into the American Federation of Labor. Between 1920 and 1938 the great depression came, and the American working class took the giant step to industrial unionism. But still the working class remained unorganized politically. In the last thirty years new millions of workers have come into the labor movement. The working class has made great gains, even though the union bureaucracy, based upon the capitalist prosperity, has been the willing tool of the bosses. The great contradiction remains, indeed it is greater than ever.

In 1886, 1920 and 1938, the discussion of the tasks in the United States was also a discussion of philosophic method. It could not be otherwise. It was impossible for the American movement to advance without a scientific understanding of capitalism and this required a scientific method of thought, materialist dialectics.

The first American Marxists, as Engels pointed out, began with a credo, not a scientific method. They didn't even begin the job of analyzing and understanding the American class struggle, preferring instead to shut themselves off in their

closed propaganda circles. It was not just a matter of not accepting the correct program, it was a fundamental method of work and of thought that had to be changed. Thus Engels does not propose merely accepting one or another slogan of tactic, but the basic conception of acting on one's theory, developing that theory in action, uniting theory and practice.

Lenin faced precisely the same confusion in method when he met the American followers of the Bolsheviks. That is why, in his conversations with Fraina in 1920, he shifted from a discussion of the labor party to a discussion of the need for philosophy in the movement. In his first discussion it became obvious that Fraina was not beginning from the standpoint of the Bolsheviks. He was not making a serious analysis of American capitalism.

For Fraina to understand how the working class would come to an understanding of the need for socialist revolution he had to understand how the workers learn through struggle, through testing all of their illusions as well as the warnings and programs brought to them by the revolutionary movement. Marxists had to guide the working class through struggle, patiently explaining the causes of defeats and requirements for victory. This is what the dialectical method is all about. Lenin was interested in far more than an orientation towards the trade unions and a labor party. Although such an orientation was absolutely necessary, it had to be linked to a constant theoretical and philosophical struggle within the movement.

It is important to recognize that while the Communist International was able to convince the American party of the correctness of the labor party conception, the method underlying the conception was not grasped. While the Americans began by accepting a correct political line they soon accepted disastrously incorrect proposals, with the rise of Stalin to power in the USSR and the international movement. Clearly more than a correct line was required, it was necessary to understand how to arrive at such a line.

### **trotsky discusses**

This same lesson is brought home by the discussions between Trotsky and the Socialist Workers Party leaders. These discussions are also a handbook in method. Fragmentary as these are, they express the basic Marxist method as Trotsky explains what is wrong with the method of his supporters.

It should be noted that this is the second time Trotsky discussed the labor party question with the American Trotskyists. In 1932 Trotsky wrote a memorandum agreeing with the American section's position at the time of not calling for a labor party. As he explains in the 1938 discussion he erroneously felt it was possible for a mass

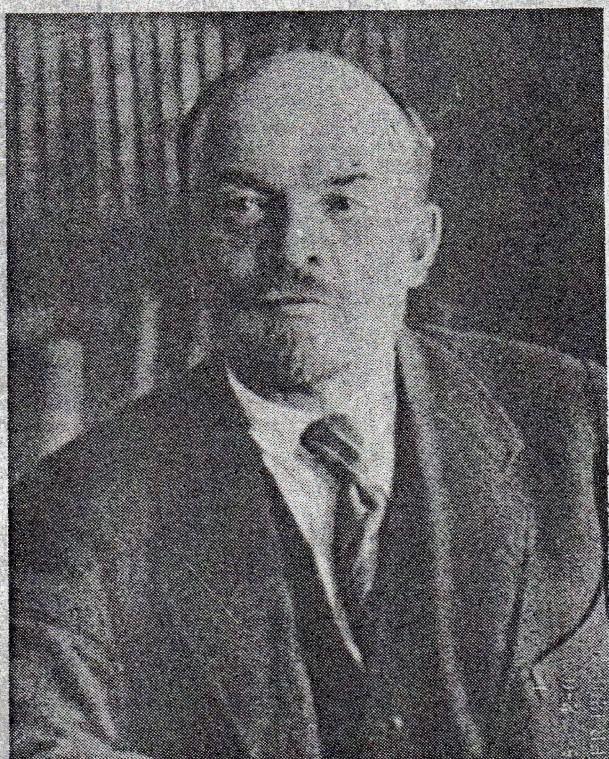
revolutionary party to be created under the extreme crisis conditions of the time without going through the stage of struggling for a labor party. Whatever merit such a position may have had in 1932 it certainly has no relevance to the kind of situation American Marxists face in 1968.

The SWP leaders approach the question pragmatically and empirically. Cannon begins with the amazing statement, in relation to the labor party movement, that, 'In principle it appears that we should condemn the whole movement and stand aside but that is not a very fruitful policy.' Later he returns to this theme, saying that 'if we can do that (fight for a labor party) without compromising our principled position that would be best in the sense of gaining influence.'

Cannon, Shachtman and other participants then begin a lengthy discussion on the issue of how much sentiment there is for a labor party. Though they disagree on how much labor party sentiment exists, they agree in basing their position on this measurement of existing moods.

Trotsky made his position very clear:

I cannot judge whether sentiment for a labor party exists or not because I have no personal observations or impressions, but I do not find it decisive as to what degree the leaders of trade unions or the rank and file are ready or inclined to build a political party. It is very difficult to establish objective information. We have no machine to take a referendum. We can measure the mood only by action if the slogan is put on the agenda. But what we can say is that the objective situation is absolutely decisive... The problem is not the



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mood of the masses but the objective situation, and our job is to confront the backward material of the masses with the tasks which are determined by objective facts and not by psychology

... We claim to have Marxism or Scientific Socialism. What does 'Scientific Socialism' signify in reality? It signifies that the party which represents this social science, departs, as every science, not from subjective wishes, tendencies or moods but from objective facts, from the material situation of the different classes and their relationships.

Trotsky is insisting that we develop the programmatic points we fight for on a scientific objective basis. Our method of determining the subjective state of the class--a not unimportant question--is to fight for this scientifically arrived at program among the masses and see what response is forthcoming. This response is also important for all agitation and propagandistic work should be a dialogue with the masses in which we learn much from the response we get from particular slogans and formulations. We then can adjust our propaganda to make it more effective--perhaps treat certain questions in a more educational way or transform questions we have been educating on for a period into fighting agitation demands. These moods of the masses thus effect the way in which we fight for our program but they do not determine the program we fight for.

Cannon is approaching the question pragmatically when he speaks of fruitfulness completely and artificially separated from principle and theory. On the one hand we have our principles, on the other hand we have tempting opportunities to expand our influence. The pragmatist sees theory as only an approximation of reality, since reality exists but cannot be fully known. Theory and practice are thus separated, with imperfect theory imposed upon reality. What Cannon is really suggesting, then, is that we can perhaps proceed by putting our principles aside for the time being, not compromising them of course but just not letting them get in the way of what could be fruitful work.

The Marxist begins differently, relating theory to practice at every step. Principles and practice are not separate. They are constantly developing and interacting. The fight for a labor party is not unprincipled if it is seen dialectically, as a party of the class struggle, and if our principles are seen as living and not dead unchanging dogma.

Marxists have nothing to hide. They proclaim their views, without camouflage, as Trotsky says. They do not pretend that the working class can achieve its aims short of a socialist revolution, they do not sow illusions in parliamentary struggle or in peaceful roads to socialism. But neither do they stand aside from the struggle with a pure blueprint. They are part of the class struggle,

the most advanced section of the working class.

Thus Trotsky shows over and over again how it is necessary, in relation to the working class movement to, in Engels' words, 'accept its actual starting point' without adapting to its present backwardness. This is the meaning of the transitional program. To speak of fruitful policies on the one hand and abstract principles on the other is to show absolutely no understanding of this program.

There is also a clear connection between the confusion brought out in this discussion and the resistance of earlier American Marxists on this question. It is not only native American pragmatism which is brought out here, the method so beloved by opportunists. There is also the same formalism and schematism which the German followers of Marx and Engels had brought over with them from Europe 60 and 70 years previously.

### **formal metaphysics**

From the very beginning of the discussion of this question through the 1920 period of the Communist Party to the discussion in 1938 reprinted in this pamphlet, the very same formal posing of the question is raised -- how can we advocate the formation of a labor party when as revolutionaries we know full well the American working class can only come to power under the leadership of a revolutionary party--our party?

For instance Shachtman states: 'I don't understand when you say we don't advocate a reformist labor party but we do advocate and become champions of labor party movements for the purpose of imposing the worker's will politically'. Trotsky answers Shachtman to the effect that we combine advocacy of a labor party with our program, the program we wish this party to carry out. This program is a revolutionary program, one through which the workers can come to power, not a reformist program which can lead the workers to defeat.

Then Cannon takes his turn at being confused: 'How can you explain a revolutionary labor party?' We say: the SWP is the only revolutionary party, has the only revolutionary program. How then can you explain to the workers that also the labor party is a revolutionary party? Trotsky answers: 'I will not say that the labor party is a revolutionary party, but that we will do everything to make it possible.' Shachtman still doesn't understand and repeats: 'I still cannot understand how the labor party can be different from a reformist purely parliamentary party?' At this point Trotsky replies: 'you put the question too abstractly'. As Trotsky states later in the discussion: 'an abstraction is a weapon in the hands of the opposing class'.

This is the methodological nub of the whole discussion. For Shachtman, Cannon and rest of the SWP leadership it was a matter of relating

formal categories separated out--abstracted out of concrete reality. Each category is fixed, immutable and of course completely and absolutely in contradiction to each other category. So we have 'labor party' vs. 'revolutionary party' and we have 'reformist labor party' and 'revolutionary labor party'. None can be related to any other category; all are in absolute contradiction to each other.

As Trotsky writes in 'Whither France?': 'Marxist thought is dialectical; it considers all phenomena in their development, in their transition from one state to another. The thought of the conservative petty bourgeoisie is metaphysical; its conceptions are fixed and immovable, and between phenomena it supposes that there are unbridgeable gaps.' It is metaphysical method that Shachtman and Cannon are using. And with this method the struggle for a labor party cannot be related to the building of the revolutionary party.

But if we see the labor party demand within the context of the concrete development of the American working class as Engels, Lenin and Trotsky saw it, then and only then the connections can be made. The revolutionary party remains small and isolated. The mass of American workers have not taken the step taken by workers in every other major capitalist country, of politically breaking with their own bourgeoisie and starting on the road to building their own party. The revolutionary party cannot overcome this gap between the size of the vanguard and the necessities of independent political struggle posed by the situation facing American workers by simply urging workers to support it. But this gap can be overcome by posing to American workers that they create their own party, a political expression of the powerful many-millioned member economic organs of struggle they have already created--the American trade union movement.

But we cannot pose to workers the labor party as an empty form devoid of programmatic content. We must pose a program around which the fight for such a party can be conducted or if such a party is formed on a lesser program, a program around which the militant section of such a party can fight. And where do we get this program? Do we have some sort of inferior program designed for the more backward workers? Of course not. We propose our program as this program is the only scientific one based on a Marxist analysis of the questions facing the class, the needs of the class.

The revolutionary party plays the critical role at each stage of this process. It leads the fight for the creation of a labor party. It fights within any broader labor party movements which arise or within any kind of labor party thrown up for its revolutionary program. It takes the workers through this experience building the revolutionary party at all times and emerging from the process as a mass revolutionary party capable of leading the American workers to power.

Cannon and Shachtman left this discussion with Trotsky much as the early American Communists left their discussion with Lenin. Yes, they were convinced that revolutionaries must fight for a labor party. It was not so much that the formal objections were destroyed for them through their mastery of dialectics. It was rather that they were put aside because of the weight on the one hand of Trotsky's authority and on the other hand a recognition of the 'fruitfulness' of this policy.

That this was the case is shown in the discussion Trotsky held in June, 1940 with the leadership of the SWP. This was after Shachtman had split from the party and it was Trotsky's last discussion with the SWP before he was murdered by Stalin's agent. In this discussion Trotsky, noting the empirical left turn of the American CP brought about by the Stalin-Hitler pact, proposed that the SWP support the CP in the 1940 elections as part of a tactic to reach rank and file Communist Party militants. He met the same formal resistance as in 1938. Once again he was compelled to urge on the SWP 'more sharp maneuvering, a more serious systematic theoretical training' (See: "The Struggle for Marxism in the United States" by Tim Wohlforth). As the future evolution of the SWP reveals, his advice was not taken seriously by the SWP leadership. Today we have maneuvering yes, oh yes plenty of maneuvering. But these maneuvers have no base in Marxist theory. It is a matter of "fruitful policies" unencumbered this time by concern for principles or the authority of Trotsky.

### ***labor party today***

Everything we have said about the method of Marxism as opposed to formalism and dead dogma would mean nothing if we based our conception of the labor party now solely upon past struggles on this question. The fight for the labor party must be shown to be objectively necessary today.

The problem with the so-called New Left, and most of the old left as well, is the same methodological confusion we see expressed in these discussions. The class struggle in America is neither placed in its historical context nor analyzed seriously today. Thus the kind of objections raised to the labor party conception today are, not surprisingly, very similar to the ones which Trotsky took up 30 years ago.

Middle class radicals are especially fond of pointing to the quiescence of the workers, who are written off forever as a completely reactionary mass with a stake in American imperialism. The idea of fighting for a labor party, of raising this idea in the trade unions or among various layers of the working class, is dismissed on the basis that there is little or no sentiment favoring it. We are advised to wait for perhaps a few decades, when the workers will inform us that they are ready for such progressive ideas.

The same people who present this totally pessimistic picture of the situation, a picture based upon the crudest empiricism and pragmatism, then strike a very revolutionary pose at the same time, asserting that a labor party is after all a completely reformist proposal anyway, as the history of the British Labor Party shows. Thus, while the American working class is hopelessly reactionary and we really have nothing to say to it, we should concentrate on meaningless confrontations with the police. It is not surprising to see ultra-leftism and opportunism, formalism and pragmatism, coexisting in the same individuals and tendencies which do not fight for Marxist theory.

We must begin as Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky did. As Trotsky explains, in the United States and Britain the trade union movement came into existence long before workers' political parties were even proposed. Under these circumstances, where first England and then the U.S. was the leader of world imperialism, the trade unions would only be forced to take up the political struggle by the most serious decline and crisis facing capitalism in these countries. This is precisely how the working class embarked upon the path of independent political action in Britain, and Trotsky shows how a similar development was to be expected in the U.S. in the 1930s. Swift changes, the rapid deepening of the crisis, gave rise to the need for an independent workers' party. At the same time the revolutionary party was still too small to pose itself as a realistic alternative for the working class. This contradiction could only be dealt with and overcome by the revolutionary party posing the tasks facing the entire working class in terms of a mass-based party of the class.

Trotsky specifically takes up the prospects for a labor party in the event of a new prosperity, a new upturn in the economic situation. In this case he speaks, in 1938, of the question losing its "acuteness" but not its "propagandistic importance." It is very important to fully understand his meaning here. While undoubtedly he did not count upon as long a period of prosperity and restabilization for American and world capitalism as developed after the war, the changed tempo of events does not at all invalidate his basic prognosis for America.

The prosperity of the war and postwar periods contained the seeds of another and even more explosive crisis, but in the interim the labor party question became less acute, less sharply posed. This was reflected in the political equilibrium in the U.S. in the 1950s. It was an equilibrium attained only by the sacrifice of economic equilibrium. But while it lasted the bosses were able to rule with minimum disruption, and the trade union bureaucracy kept the ranks fairly well under control.

All of this is now changing very rapidly. The

contradictions building up underneath the surface during the 1950s and early 1960s are now coming to the surface and leading to an explosive situation. All of capitalism's current difficulties are related to its most fundamental contradictions, especially to the tendency of the rate of profit to decline. All of the problems now faced by Wall Street and Washington arise out of steps which were taken to counteract this inevitable tendency. Thus the crisis is expressed now in its financial aspect. Every step the imperialists take to deal with the liquidity crisis calls into question the continued expansion of the world economy.

Right now the crisis hits the black masses and the poor as a whole the hardest. These workers see themselves left out of the general prosperity of the country, a prosperity in which the mass of unionized workers have at least partially shared. But the capitalist government is incapable of bringing the poor up to the level of the working class as a whole. Thus, faced with this situation, the Negro struggle takes on a very radical, at the moment almost openly insurrectionary character.

But the impact of the crisis cannot be limited to the poor alone. Behind the liquidity crisis is the deeper crisis caused by the decline in profits. The great corporations make their profits off the employed industrial working class. The crisis can only be countered by a direct attack at deepening the exploitation of American labor as a whole and lowering the living conditions of all workers.

To carry out such a policy the big business interests must utilize the whole state apparatus--anti-strike legislation, court injunctions, cops and troops deployed against strikers. Such a confrontation is only now at a beginning stage. But when it comes to full bloom it will raise in a far sharper form than is raised today the necessity for workers to break politically from the parties which carry out the bosses attacks on them and form their own party. Thus the objective conditions today, as much as in the 1930s, pose before American Marxists the need to fight for a labor party within all sections of the working class.

Of course, there will be those who say: "perhaps you are right. But today the action is elsewhere--among the students, the black militants, etc. Tomorrow when the struggle in the unions deepens, then we too will turn our attention to these struggles." Trotsky answered such people in this very discussion. He states:

If you say we'll wait and see and then propagate, then we'll be not the vanguard, but the rear-guard...We underestimate the revolutionary movement in the working masses. We are a small organization, propagandistic and in such situations are more skeptical than the masses who develop very quickly...There is not in the U.S. a revolutionary situation right now.

But comrades with very revolutionary ideas in quiet times can become a real brake upon the movement in revolutionary situations -- it happens often. A revolutionary party waits so often and so long for a revolution that it gets used to postpone it.

The task for all serious Marxists in America is to begin the fight today for an American labor party. We feel that the re-publication of Trotsky's 1938 discussion can greatly aid in theoretically arming the movement for this critical task.

The discussion reprinted here is from a rough stenographic record and this should be kept in mind when reading it. Because of security problems at the time the participants are referred to either by a pseudonym (in the case of Trotsky) or by initials. Crux: Leon Trotsky; JPC: James P. Cannon; SH: Max Shachtman; VRD: Vincent R. Dunne.

-- Fred Mueller and Tim Wohlforth  
August, 1968

## Discussion With Leon Trotsky

### PART I - APRIL 1938 MEXICO CITY

JPC: The subject today is the labor party, in three aspects: 1) our general principled position; 2) the development of the Non-Partisan Labor League, that is, the CIO political movement in the trade unions which shows in some respects tendencies to independent political action, toward the constitution of a party, in other places like New York half such tendencies, labor candidates locally, support of Republican-Fusion and support of Roosevelt nationally, in other parts they endorse all capitalist candidates, mainly through the Democratic Party. 3) The question arises should our comrades in the trade unions we control join the NPLL, what should we do in unions where we have a small minority; should we become the champions of the NPLL or shall we stand aside in a critical attitude? We do not have a final policy in New Jersey, for example, we are experimenting -- we had the unions join the NPLL and there support a motion for the formation of a party. In other parts of the country we haven't done so. How should we conduct ourselves in a more or less developed labor party as in Minneapolis?

In principle it appears that we should condemn the whole movement and stand aside but that is not a very fruitful policy. In Minneapolis there is a fully constituted independent organization, the Farmer-Labor Party. It runs its own candidates in the State and nationally it supports Roosevelt.

The Stalinists who have been driven out of the trade unions have penetrated deeply into the Farmer-Labor Association -- this constitutes a weapon against us in the unions. The policy there now is the policy of a bloc of the Trotskyist unions with what they call the "real farmer-laborites," that is reformists who believe in the FLP and don't wish the Stalinists to control it. How far can we carry such a bloc -- how can we fight for just organizational control? But if our people stand aside the Stalinists get control. On the other hand, if we fight really energetically as we do in the unions we

become champions of the FLP. It is not a simple question -- it's very easy for people to get lost in the reformist policy.

VRD: First, I would say that the Stalinists in controlling the apparatus of the FLP control more than just the apparatus -- they make it difficult for us in the unions. By our not participating in this party through our trade union connections it allows the Stalinists and the more reactionary elements in the FLP to have a weapon against us in the labor movement. We have a definite policy insofar as our work in the trade unions is concerned. Our comrades speaking in favor of the FLP have done so very critically, advising the unions that they can use it only to a certain extent -- we have succeeded in keeping our policy clear from the reformists but, as Comrade Cannon says, it's difficult to say how far we should go in this direction; we cannot take the responsibility for the labor party and yet we would have that responsibility thrust on us by the workers who believe we can as efficiently fight there for their members as we do in the trade unions. Thus far even the Stalinists' drive against us has not been able to shake them yet. The Stalinists, together with a wide section of the progressives, intellectuals are at one in turning the labor party more and more into a bloc with the democrat and liberal candidates. Inside the FLP the Stalinists are trying to keep control by setting up a formal discipline in the FLP, mainly against us. We have fought that, demanding democracy in the labor party and we have been successful. We haven't been at all successful in preventing a closer bloc with the Democratic Party. We can't yet ask the unions to support the SWP as against the FLP.

JPC: In St. Paul where the FLP made a deal to support a capitalist candidate for mayor, we put up our own candidate.

Crux: Can you explain to me how was it possible that though the Stalinists control an important section of this party they passed a resolution against fascists and communists?

VRD: That was done in one region. In certain sections we have farmer-laborites who work with us--they were in control of this district as against the Stalinists--we have some comrades there--we tried to shape this resolution in a different way but we were not on the resolutions committee--late at night the resolution was jammed through.

Crux: The resolution can be used also against us. How is the party constructed? It is based not only upon trade unions but also upon other organizations because they are progressives, intellectuals, etc. Do they admit every individual, or only collectively?

VRD: The FLP is based upon workers' economic organizations, trade unions, cooperatives, etc., farmer's cooperative organizations, also upon territorial units, township clubs, etc. It also allows for the affiliation of cultural organizations sick and death benefit organizations, etc., also through war clubs. The Stalinists and intellectuals join through these clubs; they have more control than the driver's local of 4000 members. We are fighting against that--we are demanding that the trade unions be given their real representation--we have the support of the trade unions on this.

Crux: Can you tell me what are the nuances of opinion among our leading comrades on this question--approximately.

JPC: There are nuances of opinion not only among the leadership but also in the ranks. Problems arise in the trade unions especially. A motion is proposed in the unions to join the NPLL. The sentiment especially in CIO unions for this is overwhelming. I think that our policy in New Jersey, that at least in this union we must not oppose joining the NPLL will have to be adopted. There is also a tendency in the Party that in this NPLL we shall press for the formation of the labor party. I venture to say that the trade union comrades would be most satisfied if they could have that decision. But they haven't yet faced the difficulties. The dilemma is that you become the champions of the FLP by having an aggressive policy. We even have one comrade on the State Executive Committee of the FLP in New Jersey. The bureaucrats are putting off the date for formation of the FLP. The policy of Lewis, Hillman is to leave that aside till 1940. If our comrade would make an energetic fight, if he could be sincere in advocating the FLP, he could muster quite an opposition against the bureaucrats. But then the dilemma is that we are championing the creation of an FLP which we oppose.

In our Plenum there will be differences of

opinion--there will be a tendency to become energetic fighters for the constitution of a labor party. My opinion is that this is the prevailing sentiment of the Party--to join the NPLL and become aggressive fighters for the constitution of a labor party as against the policy of endorsing capitalist candidates; if we can do that without compromising our principled position that would be best in the sense of gaining influence. We don't say anything practical to the workers who are ready to take one step forward. The CP now is not championing the labor party; they are a Roosevelt Party. The bureaucrats in the trade unions are also blocking the strong movement within the workers for a labor party.

SH: I wouldn't say that the labor party sentiment is so strong among the workers today. Most of the labor party sentiment that might have arisen has been canalized toward the channel of Roosevelt. We had a formidable crisis and yet the only thing that came out of it is the hybrid form of labor party in New York. In any case if you compare 1930 with 1924 you can say there is barely a labor party movement now; then there was more real sentiment in the trade unions. I think that if we don't have a clear idea for the prospects of a labor party, that we will make some big political mistakes. I believe a big change is taking place--a breaking-up of the old parties. The biggest political party, the Democratic Party which has a support of 90% of the workers and farmers is going through a split almost before our eyes. In Congress the fight is not between Republicans and Democrats but between one section of the Democrats and another. There is very good reason to believe that in the 1940 election we will have a new political setup with the old line Republicans fused with the Democrats of the South, and the other, the New Deal Democrats, Roosevelt followers plus the CIO, Lewis; that will be powerful enough even to take the bulk of the AFL along. It is precisely this prospect that keeps Lewis, Hillman from championing a labor party--they are looking for the split in the Democratic Party in which they will be able to play a considerable role. That is why I don't think there will be a real, serious, substantial progress in the NPLL movement toward an independent labor party.

It is true that our position is rather a difficult one but we have had considerable amount of experience with labor party movements--a generalization may be helped by reference to our Minneapolis situation--I don't think our growth is due to participation in the FLP movement but through our activities in the trade unions. Nevertheless, as we grow we necessarily must participate in FLP politics and I can't say I'm entirely satisfied with the situation there. I can't



say we have proposed any other line of conduct. In effect in Minneapolis we are in a bloc with so-called honest reformists--who are scoundrels on their own account--who are in a bloc with the Democrats, is directed almost exclusively against the Stalinists and against a mechanical control the Stalinists have of the FLP. In action we are indistinguishable from the so-called honest reformists. We are distinguished from the Stalinists but only insofar as we are in a bloc with real reformists who vote for the FLP ticket in the State and for the Democrats nationally.

If we are to follow out such a policy of being against endorsing capitalist candidates in favor of FLP candidates seriously, systematically, effectively, I can't see how we can avoid becoming the champions of a labor party, of taking the initiative; wherever a labor party does not exist to form one. Unless all signs prove untrue, these labor parties will be a working appendage of Roosevelt just as was the case in the New York American Labor Party supporting Roosevelt nationally, and on a local scale supporting Republican Fusion. Once that's begun I don't see clearly how we will avoid the consequences of a policy that was followed in 1924 when we were in the CP, with the added complication that the Stalinist Party is in the unions and while it's true that they are a Roosevelt Party, still in the unions they advocate formation of a labor party.

JPC: Not much. I would say that the Stalinists in the first period of the Peoples Front had the slogan "Organize the labor party as the American People's Front" but now it's only a

ceremonial action. At this point they are even against a premature splitting of the Democratic Party. It is not true that the sentiment now is less than in 1924 for a labor party. Then it had no basis in the unions; it was mostly a farmers' movement. Now the movement is dominated by the CIO unions. It is not the old Gompers politics. The unions are regimented politically; the sentiment in the ranks for their own party is quite strong. The NPL is not going out to meet the sentiment of the workers. The policy of Lewis and the bureaucrats is experimental; if the workers will clamor more, they will make concessions to that sentiment. It is a step higher than the Gompers policy.

(Stenographer's note: More argument about the relative strength of labor party sentiment in 1922-1924 now took place between Comrades JPC and VRD on one side and SH on the other.)

Crux: This question is very important and very complicated. When for the first time the League considered this question, some seven-eight years ago--whether we should favor a labor party or not, whether we should develop initiative on this score, then the prevailing sentiment was not to do it, and that was absolutely correct. The perspective for development was not clear. I believe that the majority of us hoped that the development of our own organization will be more speedy. On the other hand I believe no one in our ranks foresaw during that period the appearance of the CIO with this rapidity and this power. In our perspective we overestimated the possibility of the development of our party at the expense of the Stalinists on one hand, and on the other hand we

don't (didn't) see this powerful trade union movement, and the rapid decline of American capitalism. These are two facts which we must reckon with. I can't speak from my own observation but theoretically. The period of 1924 I know only through the experience of our common friend Pepper. He came to me and said that the American proletariat is not a revolutionary class, that the revolutionary class are the farmers and we must turn toward the farmers, not toward the workers. That was the conception of the time. It was a farmers' movement--the farmers who are inclined by their social nature to look for panaceas--populism, FLP'ism--in every crisis. Now we have a move-



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ment of tremendous importance--the CIO, some 3,000,000 or more are organized in a new, militant organization. This organization which began with strikes, big strikes, and also involved with AFL partially in these strikes for a raise in wages, this organization at the first step of its activity runs into the biggest crisis in the U.S. The perspective for economic strikes is for the next period excluded, given the situation of the growing unemployed ranks, etc. We can look for the possibility that it will put all its weight in the political balance.

The whole objective situation imposed upon the workers as upon the leaders--upon the leaders in a double sense. On one hand they exploit this tendency for their own authority and on the other they try to break it and not permit it to go ahead of its leaders. The NPLL has this double function. I believe that our policy need not be theoretically revised but it needs to be concretized. In what sense? Are we in favor of the creation of a reformist labor party? No. Are we in favor of a policy which can give to the trade unions the possibility to put its weight upon the balance of the forces? Yes.

It can become a reformist party--it depends upon the development. Here comes in the question of program. I mentioned yesterday and I will underline it today--we must have a program of transitional demands, the most complete of them is a workers' and farmers' government. We

are for a party, for an independent party of the toiling masses who will take power in the State. We must concretize it--we are for the creation of factory committees, for workers' control of industry through the factory committees. All these questions are now pending in the air. They speak of technocracy, and put forward the slogan of 'production for use'. We oppose this charlatan formula and advance the workers' control of production through the factory committees.

Lundberg writes a book, "Sixty Families". The "Analyst" claims that his figures are false. We say, the factory committees should see the books. This program we must develop parallel with the idea of a labor party in the unions, and workers' militia. Otherwise it is an abstraction and an abstraction is a weapon in the hands of the opposing class. The criticism of the Minneapolis comrades is that they have not concretized a program. In this fight we must underline that we are for the bloc of workers and farmers, but not such farmers as Roosevelt. I do not know whether you noted that in the official ticket he gave his profession as farmer. We are for a bloc only with the exploited farmers, not exploiter farmers, exploited farmers and agricultural workers. We can become the champions of this movement but on the basis of a concrete program of demands. In Minneapolis the first task should be devoted to statistically show that 10,000 workers have no more vote than 10 intellectuals, or 50 people organized by the Stalinists. Then we have to introduce five or six demands, very concrete, adapted to the mind of the workers and farmers and inculcated into the brain of every comrade, workers, factories' committee and then workers' and farmers' movement. That's the genuine sense of the movement.

JPC: Would we propose now that the unions join the NPLL?

Crux: Yes, I believe so. Naturally we must make our first step in such a way as to accumulate experience for practical work, not to engage in abstract formulas, but develop a concrete program of action and demands, in the sense that this transitional program issues from the conditions of capitalist society today but immediately leads over the limits of capitalism. It is not the reformist minimum program, which never included workers' militia, workers' control of production. These demands are transitory because they lead from the capitalist society to the proletarian revolution, a consequence insofar as they become the demands of the masses as the proletarian government. We can't stop only with the day to day demands of the proletariat. We must give to the most backward workers some concrete slogan that corresponds to their needs and that leads dialectically to the conquest of power.

SH: How would you motivate the slogan for workers' militia?

Crux: By the fascist movement in Europe--all the situation shows that the blocs of the members of liberals, radicals and the worker's bureaucracy is nothing in comparison with the militarized fascist gang; only workers with military experience can oppose the fascist danger. I believe that in America you have enough scabs, gun-men that you connect the slogan with the local experience; for example by showing the attitude of the police, the state of affairs in Jersey. In this situation immediately say that this gangster-mayor with his gangster policemen should be ousted by the workers' militia. "We wish here the organization of the CIO but in violation of the constitution, we are forbidden this right to organize. If the federal power can not control the mayor, then we the workers must organize for our protection the workers' militia and fight for our rights." Or in clashes between the AFL and the CIO, we can put forward the slogan for a workers' militia as a necessity to protect our workers' meetings. Especially as opposed to the Stalinist idea of a popular front, and we can point to the result of this popular front--the fate of Spain and the situation in France. Then you can point to the movement of Germany, to the Nazi camps. We must say: You workers in this city will be the first victims of this fascist gang. You must organize, you must be prepared.

JPC: What name would you call such groups?

Crux: You can give it a modest name, workers' militia.

JPC: Defense Committees.

Crux: Yes. It must be discussed with the workers.

JPC: The name is very important. Workers' defense committees can be popularized. Workers' militia is too foreign sounding.

SH: There is not yet in the US the danger of fascism which would bring about the sentiment of such an organization as the workers' militia. The organization of a workers' militia presupposes preparation for the seizure of power. This is not yet on the order of the day in the US.

Crux: Naturally we can conquer power only when we have the majority of the working class, but even in that case the workers' militia would be a small minority. Even in the October Revolution the militia was a small minority. But the question is how to get this small minority which must be organized and armed with the sympathy of the masses. How can we do it?

By preparing the mind of the masses, by propaganda. The crisis, the sharpening of class relations, the creation of a workers' party, a labor party signifies immediately, immediately a terrible sharpening of forces. The reaction will be immediately a fascist movement. That is why we must now connect the idea of the labor party with the consequences--otherwise we will appear only as pacifists with democratic illusions. Then we also have the possibility of spreading the slogans of our transitional program and see the reaction of the masses. We will see what slogans should be selected, what slogans abandoned, but if we give up our slogans before the experience, before seeing the reaction of the masses, then we can never advance.

VRD: I wanted to ask one question about the slogan of workers' access to the secrets of industry. It seems to me that needs to be well thought out and carefully applied or it may lead to difficulties which we have already experienced. As a matter of fact one of the ways of reducing the militancy of the workers is for employers--we had one such case--to offer to show us the books and prove that they are standing a loss, whether honestly or not is not the question. We have fought against that, saying it is up to you to organize your business; we demand decent working conditions. I wonder what then would be the effect of our slogan of workers' access to the secrets of industry.

Crux: Yes, the capitalists do in two instances, when the situation of the factory is really bad or if they can deceive the workers. But the question must be put from a more general point of view. In the first place you have millions of unemployed and the government claims it cannot pay more and the capitalists say that they cannot make more contributions--we want to have access to the bookkeeping of this society. The control of income should be organized through factory committees. Workers will say: We want our own statisticians who are devoted to the working class. If a branch of industry shows that it is really ruined, then we answer: We propose to expropriate you. We will direct better than you. Why have you no profit? Because of the chaotic condition of capitalist society. We say: commercial secrets are a conspiracy of the exploiters against the exploited, of the producers against the toilers. In the free era, in the era of competition they claimed they needed secrecy for protection. But now they do not have secrets among themselves but only from society. This transitional demand is also a step for the workers' control of production as the preparatory plan for the direction of industry. Everything must be controlled by the workers who will be the masters of society tomorrow. But to call for conquest of power--that seems to the American workers illegal, fan-

tastic. But if you say: the capitalists refuse to pay for the unemployed and hide their real profits from the State and from the workers by dishonest bookkeeping, the workers will understand that formula. If we say to the farmer: the bank fools you. They have very big profits. And we propose to you that you create farmers' committees to look into the bookkeeping of the bank, every farmer will understand that. We will say: the farmer can trust only himself; let him create committees to control agricultural credits--they will understand that. It presupposes a turbulent mood among the farmers; it cannot be accomplished every day. But to introduce this idea into the masses and into our own comrades, that's absolutely necessary immediately.



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SH: I believe it is not correct as you say to put forth the slogan of workers' control of production nor the other transitional slogan of workers' militia--the slogan for the examination of the books of the capitalist class is more appropriate for the present period and can be made popular. As for the other two slogans, it is true that they are transitional slogans, but for that end of the road which is close to the preparation for the seizure of power. Transition implies a road either long or short. Each stage of the road requires its own slogans. For today we could use that of examination of the books of the capitalist class, for tomorrow we would use those of workers' control of production and workers' militia.

Crux: How can we in such a critical situation as now exists in the whole world, in the US measure the stage of development of the workers' movement? You say it's the beginning and not the end. What's the distance--100, 10, 4, how can you say approximately? In the good old times the Social Democrats would say: Now we have only 10,000

workers, later we'll have 100,000, then a million and then we'll get to the power. World development to them was only an accumulation of quantities: 10,000, 100,000, etc. etc. Now we have an absolutely different situation. We are in a period of declining capitalism, of crises that become more turbulent and terrible and approaching war. During a war the workers learn very quickly. If you say we'll wait and see and then propagate, then we'll be not the vanguard, but the rear-guard. If you ask me: Is it possible that the American workers will conquer power in ten years? I will say, yes, absolutely possible. The explosion of the CIO shows that the basis of the capitalist society is undermined. Workers' militia and workers' control of production are only two sides of the same question. The worker is not a bookkeeper. When he asks for the books, he wants to change the situation, by control and then by direction. Naturally our advancing slogans depends upon the reaction we meet in the masses. When we see the reaction of the masses, we know what side of the question to emphasize. We will say Roosevelt will help the unemployed by the war industry. But if we workers ran production, we would find another industry, not one for the dead but for the living. This question can become understandable even for an average worker who never participated in a political movement. We underestimate the revolutionary movement in the working masses. We are a small organization, propagandistic and in such situations are more sceptical than the masses who develop very quickly. At the beginning of 1917 Lenin said that the party is ten times more revolutionary than its Central Committee and the masses a hundred times more revolutionary than the ranks of the party.

There is not in the US a revolutionary situation now. But comrades with very revolutionary ideas in quiet times can become a real brake upon the movement in revolutionary situations--it happens often. A revolutionary party waits so often and so long for a revolution that it gets used to postpone it.

JPC: You see that phenomenon in strikes--they sweep the country and take the revolutionary party by surprise. Do we put forward this transitional program in the trade unions?

Crux: Yes, we propagandize this program in the trade unions, propose it as the basic program for the labor party. For us it is a transitional program but for them it is the program. Now it's a question of workers' control of production. But you can realize this program only through a workers' and farmers' government. We must make this slogan popular.

JPC: Is this also to be put forward as a transitional program or is this a pseudonym for

the dictatorship of the proletariat?

Crux: In our mind it leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat. We say to the workers and farmers: You want Lewis as president--well that depends upon his program. Lewis plus Green plus La Follette as representatives of the farmers? That too depends upon the program. We try to concretize, to make more precise the program, then the workers' and farmers' government signifies a government of the proletariat which leads the farmers.

SH: How do you reconcile this with the original statement that we can not advocate the organization of a reformist labor party? I would like to get clear in my mind what concretely does our comrade do when his trade union is affiliated to the NPLL and he is sent as a delegate to the Labor Party. There the question comes up of what to do in the elections and it is proposed: "Let us support La Guardia." Concretely how does the matter present itself to our comrades?

Crux: Here we are in a trade union meeting to discuss the affiliation to the NPLL. I will say in the trade union: First, the unification of the unions on a political plan is a progressive step. There is a danger that it will fall into the hands of our enemies. I therefore propose two measures: 1) That we have only workers and farmers as our representatives; that we do not depend on so-called parliamentary friends; 2) That our representatives follow out our program, this program. We then map out concrete plans concerning unemployment, military budget, etc. Then I say, if you propose me as a candidate, you know my program. If you send me as your representative I will fight for this program in the NPLL, in the labor party. When the NPLL makes a decision to vote for La Guardia, I either resign with protest or protest and remain: "I can't vote for La Guardia, I have my mandate." We get large new possibilities for propaganda.

The dissolution of our organization is absolutely excluded. We make absolutely clear that we have our organization, our press, etc., etc. It is a question of the relationship of forces. Comrade Dunne says we cannot yet advocate in the unions support for the SWP. Why? Because we are too weak. And we can't say to the workers: Wait till we become more authoritative, more powerful. We must intervene in the movement as it is...

SH: If there were no movement for a labor party and we would be opposed to the creation of one, how does that effect the program itself--it would still be our transitional program. I don't understand when you say we can't advocate a reformist party but we do advocate and become

champions of labor party movements for the purpose of imposing the workers' will politically.

Crux: It would be absurd to say that we advocate a reformist party. We can say to the leaders of the NPLL: "You're making of this movement a purely opportunistic appendage to the Democrats." It's a question of a pedagogical approach. How can we say that we advocate the creation of a reformist party? We say you cannot impose your will through a reformist party but only through a revolutionary party? The Stalinists and liberals wish to make of this movement a reformist party but we have our program, we make of this a revolutionary...

JPC: How can you explain a revolutionary labor party? We say: the SWP is the only revolutionary party, has the only revolutionary program. How then can you explain to the workers that also the labor party is a revolutionary party?

Crux: I will not say that the labor party is a revolutionary party, but that we will do everything to make it possible. At every meeting I will say: I am a representative of the SWP. I consider it the only revolutionary party. But I am not a sectarian. You are trying now to create a big workers' party. I will help you but I propose that you consider such a program for this party. I make such and such propositions. I begin with this. Under these conditions it would be a big step forward. Why not say openly what is? Without any camouflage, without any diplomacy.

JPC: Up until now the question has always been put abstractly. The question of the program has never been outlined as you have outlined it. The Lovestoneites have always been for a labor party, but they have no program, it's combinations from the top. It seems to me that if we have a program and always point to it...

Crux: First there is the program, and then the statutes that assures the domination of the trade unions as against the individual liberals, petty bourgeois, etc. Otherwise it can become a labor party by social composition, a capitalist party in policy.

JPC: It seems to me that in Minneapolis it's too much an organizational struggle, a struggle for the control of the organization between the Stalinists and us. We have to develop in Minneapolis a programmatic fight against the Stalinists in the FLP, as we yesterday utilized the vote about the Ludlow Amendment.

SH: Now with the imminence of the outbreak

of war the labor party can become a trap. And I still can't understand how the labor party can be different from a reformist, purely parliamentary party.

Crux: You put the question too abstractly. Naturally it can crystallize into a reformist party and one that will exclude us. But we must be part

of the movement. We must say to the Stalinists, Lovestoneites, etc.: "We are in favor of a revolutionary party. You are doing everything to make it reformist." But we always point to our program. And we propose our program of transitional demands. As to the war question and the Ludlow Amendment, we'll discuss that tomorrow and I will again show the use of our transitional program in that situation.

## PART II - MAY 31, 1938 MEXICO CITY

Question: In the ranks of our party the question which seems most disputed in relation to accepting the program of transitional demands is that dealing with the labor party in the United States. Some comrades maintain that it is incorrect to advocate the formation of a labor party, holding that there is no evidence to indicate any widespread sentiment for such a party, that if there were such a party in process of formation, or even widespread sentiment then we would meet it with a program that would give to this movement a revolutionary content - but in view of the lack of such objective factors this part of the thesis is opportunistic. Could you clarify this point further?

Crux: I believe that it is necessary to remind ourselves of the most elementary facts from the history of the development of the workers' movement in general and the trade unions in particular. In this respect we find different types of development of the working class in different countries. Every country has a specific type of development but we classify them in general.

In Austria and in Russia especially the workers' movement began as a political movement, as a party movement. That was the first step. The Social Democracy in its first stage hoped that the socialist reconstruction of society was near but it happened that capitalism was strong enough to last for a time. A long period of prosperity passed and the Social Democracy was forced to organize trade unions. In such countries as Germany, Austria, and especially in Russia where trade unions were unknown, they were initiated, constructed, and guided by a political party, the Social Democracy.

Another type of development is that disclosed in the Latin countries, in France, and especially in Spain. Here the party movement and the trade union movement are almost independent of one another and under different banners, even to a certain degree antagonistic to one another. The party is a parliamentary machine. The trade unions are to a certain degree in France -- more in Spain -- under the leadership of anarchists.

The third type is provided by Great Britain the United States, and more or less by the dominions. England is the classic country of trade un-

ions. They began to build trade unions at the end of the 18th century, before the French Revolution, and during the so-called industrial revolution. (In the United States during the rise of the manufacturing system.) In England the working class didn't have its independent party. The trade unions were organizations of the working class, in reality the organization of the labor aristocrats, the higher strata. In England there was an aristocratic proletariat, at least in its upper strata, because the British bourgeoisie, enjoying almost monopoly control of the world market, could give a small part of the wealth to the working class and so absorb part of the national income. The trade unions were adequate to abstract that from the bourgeoisie. Only after a hundred years did the trade unions begin to build up a political party. This is absolutely contrary to Germany or Austria. There the party awakened the working class and built up the trade unions. In England the trade unions after centuries of existence and struggle were forced to build up a political party.

What were the reasons for this change? It was due to the complete decline of English capitalism which began very sharply. The English party is only a couple of decades old, coming into prominence especially after the World War. What is the reason for this change? It is well known that it was due to the abolishing of England's monopoly control of the world market. It began in the eighties of the 19th century with the competition of Germany and of the United States. The bourgeoisie lost its ability to give the leading strata of the proletariat a privileged position. The trade unions lost the possibility to improve the situation of the workers and they were pushed onto the road of political action because political action is the generalization of economic action. Political action generalizes the needs of the workers and addresses them not to the parts of the bourgeoisie but to the bourgeoisie as a whole organized in the state.

Now in the United States we can say that the characteristic features of English development are presented in even more concentrated form in a shorter period because the whole history of the United States is shorter. Practically, the development of the trade unions in the United States began

after the Civil War but these trade unions were very backward even compared with the trade unions of Great Britain. To a great degree they were mixed trade unions of employers and employees, not fighting, militant trade unions. They were sectional and tiny. They were based on the craft system not according to industry, and we see that it is only during the last two or three years that the genuine trade unions developed in the United States. This new movement is the CIO.

What is the reason for the appearance of the CIO? It is the decay of American capitalism. In Great Britain the beginning of the decay of the capitalist system forced the existing trade unions to unite into a political party. In the United States the same phenomenon -- the beginning of the decline -- produced only the industrial trade unions, but these trade unions appeared on the scene only in time to meet the new chapter of the decline of capitalism, or -- more correct -- we can say that the first crisis of 1929-1933 gave the push and ended in the organization of the CIO. But scarcely organized, the CIO meets the second crisis, 1937-1938 which continues and deepens.

What does this fact signify? That it was a long time in the United States before the organization of trade unions but now that genuine trade unions exist, they must make the same evolution as the English trade unions. That is, on the basis of declining capital, they are forced to turn to political action. I believe that this is the most important fact of the whole matter.

The question reads, "There is no evidence to indicate any widespread sentiment for such a party." You will remember that when we discussed this question with other comrades there were some divergences of this question. I cannot judge whether sentiment for a labor party exists or not because I have no personal observations or impressions, but I do not find it decisive as to what degree the leaders of the trade unions or the rank and file

are ready or inclined to build a political party. It is very difficult to establish objective information. We have no machine to take a referendum. We can measure the mood only by action if the slogan is put on the agenda. But what we can say is that the objective situation is absolutely decisive. The trade unions as trade unions can have only a defensive activity, losing members and becoming more and more weak as the crisis deepens, creating more and more unemployed. The treasury becomes poorer and poorer, the tasks bigger and bigger while their means smaller and smaller. It is a fact; we cannot change it. The trade union bureaucracy becomes more and more disoriented, the rank and file more and more dissatisfied and this dissatisfaction becomes greater and greater the higher were their hopes in the CIO, and especially in view of the unprecedented growth of the CIO -- in two or three years 4,000,000 fresh people on the field facing objective handicaps which can not be eliminated by the trade unions. In this situation we must give an answer. If the trade union leaders are not ready for political action we must ask them to develop a new political orientation. If they refuse we denounce them. That is the objective situation.

I say here what I said about the whole program of transitional demands. The problem is not the mood of the masses but the objective situation, and our job is to confront the backward material of the masses with the tasks which are determined by objective facts and not by psychology. The same is absolutely correct for this specific question on the labor party. If the class struggle is not to be crushed, replaced by demoralization, then the movement must find a new channel and this channel is political. That is the fundamental argument in favor of this slogan.

We claim to have Marxism or Scientific Socialism. What does "Scientific Socialism" signify in reality? It signifies that the party which represents this social science, departs, as every science not from subjective wishes, tendencies, or moods but from objective facts, from the material situation of the different classes and their relationships. Only by this method can we establish demands adequate to the objective situation and only after this can we adapt these demands and slogans to the given mentality of the masses. But to begin with this mentality as the fundamental fact would signify not a scientific but a conjunctural, demagogic, or adventuristic policy.

One can ask why we didn't foresee this development five, six, seven years ago? Why did we declare during the past period that we were not willing to fight for this slogan of the labor party? The explanation is very simple. We were absolutely sure, we Marxists, the initiators of the American movement for the Fourth International, that world capitalism had entered into a period of decline. That is the period when the working class is objectively educated and moves subjectively,



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preparing for the socialist revolution. The direction was the same in the United States, but the question of direction is not sufficient. The other question is the speed of its development; and in this respect, in view of the strength of American capitalism, some of us, and myself among them, imagined that the ability of American capitalism to resist against the destructive inner contradictions would be greater and that for a certain period American capitalism might use the decline of European capital to cover a period of prosperity before its own decline. How long a period? Ten to thirty years one could say? Any way I personally didn't see that this sharp crisis or series of crises would begin in the next period and become deeper and deeper. That is why eight years ago when I discussed this question with American comrades I was very cautious. I was very cautious in my prognosis. My opinion was that we couldn't foresee when the American trade unions would come into a period where they could be forced into political action. If this critical period started in ten to fifteen years, then we, the revolutionary organization, could become a great power directly influencing the trade unions and becoming the leading force. That is why it would be absolutely pedantic, abstract, artificial to proclaim the necessity for the labor party in 1930 and this abstract slogan would be a handicap to our own party. That was at the beginning of the preceding crisis. Then that this period would be followed by a new crisis even more deep with an influence five to ten times more profound because it is a repetition!

Now we must not reckon by our prognosis of yesterday but by the situation of today. American capitalism is very strong but its contradictions are stronger than capitalism itself. The speed of decline came at American speed and this created a new situation for the new trade unions, the CIO even more than the AFL. In this situation it is worse for the CIO than the AFL because the AFL is more capable of resistance due to its aristocratic base. We must change our program because the objective situation is totally different from our former prognosis.

What does this signify? That we are sure the working class - the trade unions will adhere to the slogan of the labor party? No, we are not sure that the workers will adhere to the slogan of the labor party. When we begin the fight we cannot be sure of being victorious. We can only say that our slogan corresponds to the objective situation and the best elements will understand and the most backward elements who don't understand will be compromised.

In Minneapolis we cannot say to the trade unions you should adhere to the Socialist Workers Party. It would be a joke even in Minneapolis. Why? Because the decline of capitalism develops ten - a hundred times faster than the speed of our party. It is a new discrepancy. The necessity

of a political party for the workers is given by the objective conditions, but our party is too small with too little authority in order to organize the workers into its own ranks. That is why we must say to the workers, the masses, you must have a party. But we cannot say immediately to these masses, you must join our party. In a mass meeting 500 would agree on the need for a labor party, only five agree to join our party, which shows that the slogan of a labor party is an agitational slogan. The second slogan is for the more advanced.

Should we use both slogans or one? I say both. The first, independent labor party, prepares the arena for our party. The first slogan prepares and helps the workers to advance and prepares the path for our party. That is the sense of our slogan. We say that we will not be satisfied with this abstract slogan which even today is not so abstract as ten years ago because the objective situation is different. It is not concrete enough. We must show to the workers what this party should be, an independent party, not for Roosevelt or La Follette, a machine for the workers themselves. That is why on the field of election it must have its own candidates. Then we must introduce our transitional slogans, not all at once, but as occasion arises, first one and then the other. That is why I see absolutely no justification for not accepting this slogan. I see only a psychological reason. Our comrades in fighting against Lovestoneites wanted our own party and not this abstract party. Now it is disagreeable. Naturally the Stalinists will say we are Fascists, etc. But it is not a principled question; it is a tactical question. To Lovestone it will seem that we lose face before the Lovestoneites, but this is nothing. We orient not according to Lovestone but according to the needs of the working class. I believe that even from the point of view of our competition with the Lovestoneites it is a plus and not a minus. In a meeting against a Lovestoneite I would explain what our position was and why we changed. "At that time you Lovestoneites attacked us. Good. Now in this question which was so important to you we have changed our mind. Now what do you have against the Fourth International?" I am sure we will prepare a split in this manner among the Lovestoneites. In this sense I see no obstacles.

Before finishing -- a correction in the formulation of the question: The labor party proposal is not a part of the program of transitional demands but is a special motion.

Question: In a trade union does one advocate a 'labor party', vote for it?

Crux: Why not? In the case of a trade union where the question comes up, I will get up and say that the need for a labor party is absolutely proved by all the events. It is proved that econ-

omic action is not enough. We need political action. In a union I will say what counts is the content of the labor party, that is why I reserve something to say about the program, but I will vote for it.

Question: The workers seem absolutely apathetic toward a labor party; their leaders are doing nothing and the Stalinists are for Roosevelt.

Crux: But that is characteristic of a certain period where there is no program. Where they don't see the new road. It is absolutely necessary to overcome this apathy. It is absolutely necessary to give a new slogan.

Question: Some comrades have even collected figures tending to prove that the labor party movement is actually declining among the workers.

Crux: There is a major line and then minor oscillations as for example the moods of the CIO. First aggressiveness. Now in the crisis the CIO appears a thousand times more dangerous than

before to the capitalists, but the leaders are afraid to break with Roosevelt. The masses wait. They are disoriented, unemployment is increasing. It is possible to prove that the sentiment has decreased since a year ago. Possibly the Stalinist influence adds to this but this is only a secondary oscillation and it is very dangerous to base ourselves upon the secondary oscillations since in a short time the major movement becomes more imperative and this objective necessity will find its subjective expression in the heads of the workers, especially if we help them. The party is a historic instrument to help the workers.

Question: Some of the members who came from the Socialist Party complain that at that time they were for a labor party and were convinced in arguing with the Trotskyists that they were wrong. Now they must switch back.

Crux: Yes, it is a pedagogical question, but it is a good school for the comrades. Now they can see dialectical development better than before.

## PART III - JULY 20, 1938 MEXICO CITY

Question: What influence can "prosperity", an economic rise of American capitalism in the next period, have upon our activity as based on the transitional program?

Crux: It is very difficult to answer because it is an equation with many unknown elements, magnitudes. The first question is if a conjunctural improvement is probable in the near future. It is very difficult to answer, especially for a person who does not follow the charts from day to day. As I see from the New York Times, the business index showed a very confused tendency. During the last week there was a loss, two weeks before a rise, and so on.

If you consider the general picture we see that a new crisis has begun, showing an almost vertical line of decline up until January of this year, then the line becomes hesitant--a zigzag line, but with general declining tendency. But the decline during this year is undoubtedly slower than the decline during the nine months of the preceding year.

If we consider the preceding period beginning with the slump of 1929, we see that the crisis lasted almost three and a half years before the upturn began, with some smaller ups and downs, lasting four and a half years--it was Roosevelt "prosperity". In this way the last cycle was of eight years, three and a half years of crisis and four and a half years of relative "prosperity", eight years being considered as a normal time for a capitalist cycle.

Now the new crisis began in August, 1937, and in nine months has reached the point which was reached in the preceding crisis in two and a half years. It is very difficult to make a prognosis now concerning the time, the point of a new rise. If we consider the new slump from the point of view of its deepness, I repeat, the work of two and a half years is completed by the crisis, yet it has not reached the lowest point of the preceding crisis. If we consider the new crisis from the point of view of time--nine years, or seven, eight years, it would be too early for a new up-movement. That is why I repeat that prognosis is difficult. Is it necessary that the new crisis should reach the same point--the lowest point--as the preceding crisis? It is probable, but it is not absolutely sure. What is characteristic of the new cycle is that "prosperity" did not reach the high point of preceding prosperity, but from that we can not make in an abstract manner a conclusion about the nadir. What characterizes the Roosevelt prosperity is the fact that it was a movement mainly of the light industries, not of the building trades, the heavy industries. This made this movement develop in a very limited fashion. That is precisely the reason why the breakdown came so catastrophically, because the new cycle did not have a solid basis of heavy industries, especially of the building trades industries which are characterized by new investments with a long-term perspective and so on.

Now we can theoretically suppose that the new

up-movement will include more than building industries--the heavy industries in general--in view of the fact that despite consumption during the last period the machinery was not renewed sufficiently and now the demand for it will be greater than during the last conjuncture. It is possible it can give a greater, a more solid up-movement than the preceding. It is absolutely not contradictory to our general analysis of a sick, declining capitalism causing greater and greater misery. This theoretical possibility is to a certain degree supported by the military investment in public relief works. It signifies from a large historical point of view that the nation becomes poorer in order to permit better conjunctures today and tomorrow. We can compare such a conjuncture with a tremendous expense to the general organism. It can be considered as possibly a new pre-war conjuncture, but when will it begin? Will the down-movement continue? It is possible--probable. In this sense all we said about the transitional program will be reinforced in every respect, but we are adopting a hypothesis of a new up-movement in the next few months, in half a year or a year. Such a movement may be inevitable.

To the first question, if such an up-movement can be more favorable to the general perspective before our party, I believe we can answer with a categorical yes, that it would be more favorable for us. There can not be any reason to believe that American capitalism can of itself in the next period become a sound, healthy capitalism, that it can absorb the 13 millions of unemployed. But the question is, if we formulate it in a very simple and arithmetical form--if in the next year or two years the industries absorb 4 millions of workers from the 13 millions unemployed, that will leave 9 million. Would that be favorable from the point of view of the revolutionary movement? I believe we can answer with a categorical yes.

We have a situation in a country--a very revolutionary situation in a very conservative country--with a subjective backwardness on the part of the mentality of the working class. In such a situation, economic pickups--sharp economic pickups, ups and downs--from a historical point of view have a secondary character but in the immediate sense have a profound effect on the lives of millions of workers. Today they have a very great importance. Such shake-ups are of a very great revolutionary importance. They shake off their conservativeness; they force them to seek an account of what is happening, what is the perspective. And every such shake-up pushes some stratum of the workers on the revolutionary road.

More concretely, now the American workers are in an impasse--a blind alley. The big movement, the CIO, has no immediate perspective because it is not guided by a revolutionary party and the difficulties of the CIO are very great. From the other side, the revolutionary elements are too weak in order to give to the movement a

sharp turn to the political road. Imagine that during the next period four millions of workers enter the industries. It will not soften the social antagonism--on the contrary. It will sharpen them. If the industries were capable of absorbing the 13 or 11 million of unemployed, then it would signify for a long period a softening of the class struggle, but it can only absorb a part, and the majority will remain unemployed. Every unemployed person sees that the employed have work. He will look for work, and not finding any will enter into the unemployed movement. I believe in this period our slogan of the sliding scale can receive very great popularity; that is, that we ask for work for everybody under decent conditions in a popular form: "We must find work for all, under decent conditions with decent salaries." The first period of a rise--economic rise--would be very favorable, especially for this slogan. I believe also that the other very important slogan of defense, workers' militia, etc., would also find favorable soil, a base, because through such a limited and uncertain rise--economic rise--the capitalists become very anxious to have immediate profits and they look with great hostility on the unions which disturb the possibility of new rise in profits. In such conditions I believe that Hague would be imitated on a large scale.

The question of the labor party before the trade unions. Of course the CIO through a new prosperity would have a new possibility of development. In that sense we can suppose that the improvement of the conjuncture would postpone the question of the labor party. Not that it will lose its whole propagandistic importance, but it will lose its acuteness. We can then prepare the progressive elements to accept this idea and be ready when the new crisis approaches, which will not be long in coming.

I believe that this question of Hagueism has a tremendous importance, and that a new prosperity, a new upturn, would give us greater possibilities. A new upturn will signify that the definite crisis, the definite conflicts are postponed for some years in spite of the sharp conflicts during the rise itself. And we have the greatest interest in winning more time because we are weak and the workers are not prepared in the United States. But even a new upturn will give us a very short time--the disproportion between the mentality and the methods of American workers in the social crisis, this disproportion is terrific. However, I have the impression that we must give some concrete examples of success and not limit ourselves only to giving good theoretical advice. If you take the New Jersey situation, it is a tremendous blow not only to social democracy but to the working class. Hague is just beginning. We also are just beginning, but Hague is a thousand times more powerful.

Of course the question of the labor party can not be considered independent from the general

development in the next period. If a new prosperity comes for some time and postpones the question of a labor party, then the question will for some time become more or less academic, but we will continue to prepare the party in order not to lose time when the question again becomes acute, but such a tremendous prosperity is not very probable now and if the economic situation remains as now, then the party can change in a short time. The most important fact we must underline is the total difference in America in connection with a working class from Europe. In Europe, let us say in Germany before Hitler, in Austria, France now, Great Britain, the question of a party for the workers was looked upon as a necessity, it was a commonplace for the vanguard of the working class and for a large stratum of the masses themselves.

In the United States the situation is absolutely different. In France political agitation consists in the attempts of the CP to win the workers, of the SP to win the workers, and every conscious or semi-conscious worker stands before a choice. Should he adhere to the SP or the CP or Radical SP? For the Radical Socialist Party it is not such a problem, since that is mostly for the foremen, but the workers have to choose between the SP and the CP. In the United States the situation is that the working class needs a party--its own party. It is the first step in political education. We can say that this first step was due five or ten years ago. Yes, theoretically that is so, but insofar as the workers were more or less satisfied by the trade union machinery, and even lived without this machinery, the propaganda in favor of a working class party was more or less theoretical, abstract and coincided with the propaganda of certain centrist and communist groups and so on. Now the situation has changed. It is an objective fact in the sense that the new trade unions created by the workers came to an impasse--a blind alley--and the only way for workers already organized in trade unions is to

join their forces in order to influence legislation, to influence the class struggle. The working class stands before an alternative. Either the trade unions will be dissolved or they will join for political action. That is the objective situation, not created by us, and in this sense the agitation for a working class party becomes now not an abstract but a totally concrete step in progress for the workers organized in the trade unions in the first instance and for those not organized at all. In the second place it is an absolutely concrete task determined by economic and social conditions. It would be absurd for us to say that because the new party issues from the political amalgamation of the trade unions it will of necessity be opportunistic. We will not invite the workers to make this same step in the same way as abroad. Of course if we had any real choice between a reformist party or a revolutionary party, we would say this is your address (meaning the revolutionary party.) But a party is absolutely necessary. It is the only road for us in this situation. To say that we will fight against opportunism, as of course we will fight today and tomorrow, especially if the working class party had been organized, by blocking a progressive step which can produce opportunism, is a very reactionary policy, and sectarianism is often reactionary because it opposes the necessary action of the working class...

I believe that the most fighting elements in the trade unions should be our youth, who should not oppose our movement to the labor party but go inside the labor party, even a very opportunist labor party. They must be inside. That is their duty. That our young comrades separate the transitional program from the labor party is understandable because the transitional program is an international question, but for the United States they are connected--both questions--and I believe that some of our young comrades accept the transitional program without good understanding of its meaning, for otherwise the formal separation of it would lose for them all importance.

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